

**ADDRESS BY HON D. GOKHOOL,  
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND  
RESEARCH**

**PRIZE GIVING CEREMONY  
OF THE  
JUNIOR SCIENCE ADVENTURE 2009**

**THURSDAY 09 JULY 2009**

**AT 12 25 HRS**

**Auditorium RGSC, Bell Village**

**Prof. M. Bhuruth, Chairman of the RGSC Trust Fund**

**Dr. A. Maulloo, Director, RGSC**

**Directors and representatives of Ministries and Parastatal institutions**

**Headteachers, Deputy Head Teachers, Teachers**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**My Dear Students**

**Good Afternoon.**

### **Welcome**

It is always a pleasure for me to be at the RGSC.

I am extremely pleased to be among you today for the finals of the Second Edition of the Junior Science Adventure (JSA) 2009, which is yet another laudable initiative from the RGSC to promote science and technology among the student community in Mauritius.

### **Junior Science Adventure**

Dear Students, I remember when I launched the first edition of the Junior Science Adventure last year, I was thrilled by concept behind this project. The fact that science is perceived as being difficult and irrelevant to real-life was revealed by the “*Teaching and Learning of Science in Schools*” Report published by MRC in 2004. It skillfully combines basic scientific

knowledge and methodology with problems that they encounter in their daily life.

The approach adopted by the JSA is therefore opportune to clearly illustrate to the young pupils that science is ever-present in our everyday life. The themes chosen for the competition are also befitting in many ways: they relate to the primary school curriculum, they are important to the well-being of one and all and finally, they are directly in line with what the Government is striving to inculcate in the population. Thus last year's theme "Me and my Environment" was not only fully consistent with the "Maurice Ile Durable" concept but it also set the pupils on a journey of life-long concern for the environment.

### **Health – Frightening Statistics**

This year's theme "I care for my Health" is again a subject of national concern. Studies have shown that highly prevalent non-communicable diseases in Mauritius like diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases are linked to common preventable risk factors related to lifestyle, such as unhealthy diet, obesity, physical inactivity and tobacco and alcohol consumption. The findings of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life in 2004 are alarming:

- About 1 out of every 5 adults over 30 years in Mauritius has diabetes, about 1 out of every 3 suffers from hypertension.
- 36% of the Mauritian population is overweight or obese.
- 36% of the males are current smokers

- 45% of males and 37% of females have high cholesterol level
- Only 24.5% of males and 9.5% of females practise adequate leisure physical activity.

These frightening statistics result from increasing modernisation leading to sedentary lifestyles— exercising less, eating unhealthily, relying on motorised transport, and partaking in passive leisure activities like watching television. We know that with the right exercise and eating habits, you function better, not only in school and at work, but in all other areas of your life.

Also we must not forget the problems caused by Chikungunya and A Virus (H1N1).

Government has been proactive by taking strong measures to deal with these situations: soft drinks and fatty foods have been banned in the school environment, smoking is strictly prohibited in all public areas, etc

Chikungunya and the A Virus have been managed with great professionalism.

We must continue to do everything possible to develop a strong Good Heath Culture among our people. The JSA can contribute towards this objective by engaging our young students to become more involved in Heath issues.

## **Science and Research for Industry**

As you may recall, last year, the Government propelled Mauritius a step closer to the bandwagon of industrialised nations by introducing a Ministry of Industry, Science and Research. One of the main objectives of this Ministry was to take a leading role in the development and promotion of science and research as a major tool for industrial development. In order to develop a strong, diversified and globally competitive industrial sector, we realise that a versatile workforce with a good threshold of scientific knowledge is needed so that it is able to constantly innovate and adopt new technologies. We therefore, consider it crucial to recognize and encourage our local human resources to venture into science and technology and come up with new ideas that can sustain the growth of the industrial sector.

In doing so, we are not reinventing the wheel. We just need to have a look to countries like USA, Japan, Finland and more recently India and China. Their relentless commitment to applied and basic scientific research and their ever-increasing investment in scientific research have ensured that they achieve the competitive edge on the international market.

This is why one of the priorities of my Ministry is to stimulate and nurture scientific talent by training and empowering the young generation.

My Ministry is acting as a platform to coordinate all efforts in the area of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI). We are developing a framework document the way forward for STI. We are also, with the support of SADC, working towards the organization of a Science, Engineering and Technology Week in September 2009.

In this context, the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre is playing a crucial role. Through a whole gamut of hands-on activities, the RGSC is popularising science across all layers of the student community. Globally, schools are the places where the action begins in creating a spirit of innovation. Schools are where we dare our children to do things they have never done before, where we expect them to make mistakes, and to pick themselves up when they fall. Schools are where we encourage children to do what they enjoy. It is also where we have to encourage every child to question and think independently.

In this context, the RGSC organises the Science Communication Contest and the National Science Challenge each year to foster the creative and problem-solving skills of the lower and upper secondary school students respectively. Since last year, the Junior Science Adventure encourages similar skills at a much younger age in primary schools. Moreover, Young Scientists Workshops are held during every school holidays to initiate our students to the wonderful world of scientific discovery.

With a view to strengthen the scientific knowledge of our students and to improve coordination among concerned parties, the RGSC is also coming up with new projects, including:

- the setting up of Science Clubs to encourage interaction and skills development among you
- a manual on the promotion of activities to promote science in our educational institutions.
- 

### **Science and Society**

Ladies, gentlemen and dear students, the whole world is presently going through difficult times. Already, we had to deal with climate change, globalisation, food and energy crisis. And now, we have a worldwide economic slowdown to deal with as well. There is no doubt in my mind that we can steer our way through these difficulties and emerge stronger on the other side.

But we all have to act together. That means drawing on the creativity and intelligence of all Mauritians – regardless of where they live or what job they do. That also means attracting investments in technology-driven sectors, which promise the creation of high-wage employment opportunities for our people.

My Ministry in collaboration with the RGSC is also bent upon tackling science at the grassroot level by forging a strong link between the society as a whole and science. We thus intend to pave the way for all Mauritians to benefit from the increased prosperity that scientific progress promises. A “Science and Society” strategy is presently being conceived with many corollaries by the RGSC. Already, a nationwide Science Project Competition has been launched in order to create an awareness of the importance of Science and Technology for Industry. More importantly, we are conducting a nationwide survey to gauge the level of Public Attitudes and Understanding of Science and Technology. The findings of this survey will subsequently dictate our course of action in creating a scientifically literate citizenship in Mauritius.

The private sector is also an integral part of our society. I therefore make a strong appeal to all the stakeholders of the local economy to take a proactive role in encouraging all endeavours that promote science and research in the country. Consequently, it is heartening to see the invaluable support of SICOM Ltd to the Junior Science Adventure for the second year running. Even in these times of economic slowdown, SICOM Ltd fulfilling its Corporate Social Responsibility by sponsoring one of the prizes for a group of very young but dynamic future scientists.

From the list of projects that have been presented by the finalists this morning, I can see that the pupils have been emphasising on healthy behaviours, by among others, promoting personal hygiene at school, devising strategies to overcome common health troubles faced by them like dental problems and headlice or finding innovative ways to sensitise their school mates on the benefits of physical activity and healthy eating. Through these endeavours, you will make a difference – a positive and visible difference.

My warmest congratulations go to all of you for your enthusiastic participation. I am glad to see that schools have undertaken such efforts wholeheartedly. All participating pupils, supervising teachers, deputy headteachers and headteachers deserve a resounding applause.

### **End Quote**

Let me end with this relevant quote from the ancient Greek physician, Herophilus, which summarizes the theme of the JSA this year:

***“When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied”***

Health is therefore, our greatest wealth and the JSA 2009 with the theme “Me and My Health” is a highly valuable and commendable project.